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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE, CA/OCS/ACS, EUR/OHI, AND L/LEI

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SUBJECT: NEW JUSTICE MINISTER PUSHES FOR REFORM RESULTS

Classified By: Poloff Justin Friedman, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY and COMMENT: In a March 2 introductory call on new Justice Minister Ana Lovrin, Ambassador Frank urged the continuation of Croatia's ambitious judicial reform program.

Lovrin said that the judicial reforms started by her predecessor would be continued, and that she expected to see good results by the end of the current government mandate in mid-2007. She cautioned that given the level of transformation sought by her program, more than one government mandate would be needed to complete the process. To her credit, one of Lovrin's first actions as Minister was to reject all candidates for chief justice of the High Commercial Court. Public attention on this decision was intense, particularly after the leading candidate, Nenad Sepic, was charged with corrupt practices in dealing with a bankruptcy case but the State Judicial Council declined to revoke his immunity to allow the case to be prosecuted. END SUMMARY and COMMENT.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Frank raised the issue of the lack of U.S. citizen access to the GoC property restitution law. Lovrin responded that the GoC took a policy decision, without any requirement to do so, to resolve all claims of property confiscated by the Communist regime. Rather than seek individual, bilateral agreements as called for in the current legislation, the GoC is working on legal changes that would remove the legislative requirement for bilateral agreements and give equal access to all claimants not previously compensated regardless of current citizenship. The Ambassador offered to work with the GoC once these changes were in place to help notify American citizens who may seek to file claims.

¶3. (U) Minister Lovrin said the GoC was also committed to reforming the process of electing local governments, starting with direct election of mayors. She said that the GoC was studying reforms implemented by other countries, noting that Norway took 15 years to review options before undertaking reforms that are ongoing.

¶4. (U) Responding to the Ambassador's question, Lovrin said that the National Strategy for Combating Corruption would be launched soon. Note: Prime Minister Sanader officially released the Strategy at a public roundtable discussion March 10 (septel).

¶5. (C) BIO NOTE: Lovrin seemed comfortable and well briefed on her new portfolio, having followed these subjects as chair of the Sabor (parliament) committee on the Justice sector. Lovrin appeared to fully understand English, answering questions before they were translated. However, she did not speak any English in this introductory call.

FRANK